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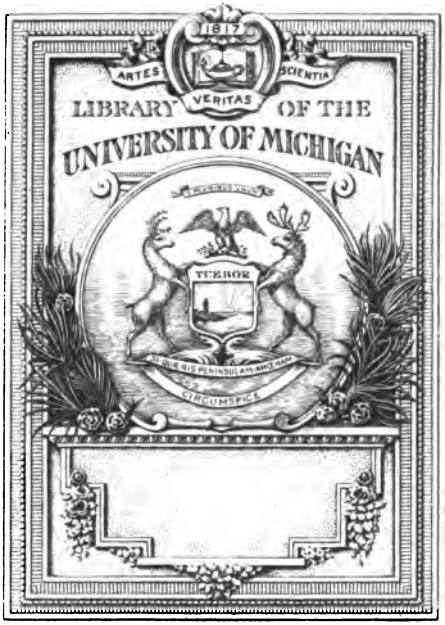
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Writing to Sell

A Text-Book of Literary Craftsmanship

By

Edwin Wildman

Writer and special correspondent, Leslie's Weekly, Vice Consul General and Deputy Consul General at Hong Kong, special war correspondent Philippines, chief Asiatic staff and special commissioner with allied troops in war with China for New York Journal, Chicago-American, and San Francisco Examiner, contributor to leading American publications, special war correspondent N. Y. World, President and Editor of M. A. P. in America, President of the Wildman Magazine & News Service.

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FOREWORD.

In my work as an editor, I have tried to impart to inexperienced writers various definite forms, methods and themes helpful to them in their desire to write salable articles, news stories and fiction. These talks have, in the course of years, gradually separated themselves into defined phases of the art of literary craftsmanship and taking this somewhat ambitious title, I am offering them in the hope that they will be helpful to those struggling with the art of writing to sell.

From time to time, as the business of writing progresses and presents new phases and applications for the author, I shall make additions to this book, bringing it to the point where it will be a current textbook for writers, both those who have a natural gift and those who desire to make a success in the trade of literary craftsmanship.

New York,
1914.

CHAPTER I.

ON WRITING TO SELL.

The larger markets—Kinds of subjects in demand—Different sorts of interests.

BY writing to sell, I mean writing for the market that buys literary product. If you are not interested in the sale of what you write, these words are not directed to you. I only address those who desire to, or must earn money by their literary output; those to whom it is a serious matter whether a piece of work of one hundred or ten thousand words becomes a salable product; and those to whom the rejection of an article may mean an empty purse, may mean a shabby coat for the winter, a vacationless summer, a giftless Christmas, in fact, may mean self-denial, if not actual want.

So you see to whom this is addressed:

to the writer to whom it is a serious matter whether acceptance or rejection is the verdict of the editor.

The Audience.

In defining my audience I have illustrated to you what I consider the first principle of writing to sell.

You must write for your audience, just as a successful public speaker "keeps down," or "rises up," to his audience. A speaker who would hold the attention of farmers must speak of things not unfamiliar to them and in language that they understand. He must draw his similes from their lives; he must couch his thoughts in figures of speech that they recognize. The same speaker, if he were to address a metropolitan audience of business men, bankers, and lawyers, employing the language used in his speech to a farming community, might find himself with a reputation of a humorist.

So if you are to write to sell, you must write toward someone or some understood and defined level of intelligence.

WRITING TO SELL

Selecting Your Market.

Let me assume that you wish to write for a good market of large demand and fair price. You must then seek to interest people of the so-called middle strata in America, the larger body of people who have been educated at grammar school, and high school, and who have jumped into practical pursuits and who depend, for their touch with the outer world, upon the newspapers and the "popular" magazines; that is, the magazines of larger circulation, the ten and fifteen cent magazines which seek to carry articles that will interest ninety per cent of their circulation; not the twenty-five and thirty-five and fifty cent magazines who interest a class or only ten per cent of the people. The popular magazines are the better markets for the writer who is seeking a living by writing, as they offer the surer market for the larger per cent of his articles.

Your Theme—Selection and Treatment.

Having selected this market and having chosen to entertain, edify, and divert these

people who have the greater average intelligence and the greater familiarity with practical life, though less of what academicians and society folk call "culture," the writer should study the limitations, the interests and the pursuits of these people, for they comprise his audience.

It is useless to write "over their heads," to deal in intellectual fireworks, pretty sounding phrases, and studied elegance of style. Plain spoken, straightforward, well chosen English is the common vehicle of their thoughts. Adopt it, and stick to it with grim determination. Don't let your literary whimsicalities get the better of you. Let your style be natural, conversational, chatty, anecdotal, if the subject warrants it, and above all, interesting and easy to read.

The ninety per cent reading public reads helpful things; articles that answer the question, "How?" There are unlimited subjects that come within this category. For instance, there is the subject of "making things" that is of unvarying interest. How to make small, handy objects for the house is a subject that appeals to millions

of girls and women. How to plant and raise flowers, care for the garden, furnish and decorate the various rooms of the house; its kitchen—which opens up the subject of cookery, a prolific and perennial subject in all its phases—how to rear and care for children, amuse, instruct, and play helpfully with them; how to develop home clubs, the social spirit and organization; reading and "culture" circles, church entertainments, vocational diversions. There are the lawn and its care, hedges, shrubbery, walks, and the stable, which lead to animals, horses, dogs and cats, their care and training. These illustrate some of the helpful kinds of articles always in demand.

Writing the Personality Article.

Then there is the "Who" article. Men and women who are doing things of fresh interest, if written about in an interesting way, make articles that are always welcomed by the editor. Such articles may be written around either the individual or the thing he or she is doing. The stories of human activity are always read with inter-

est, particularly if the story is inspirational to like activity and suggests, "what he can do I can do." A girl who raised butterflies for a living in California became a national figure because she did something unique and something others might do. A man who preached to the lumberjacks of the Northwest was the subject of many articles and a book because his work was picturesque and his character Spartan. A young woman who started and conducted a school for "incorrigible" boys, standing between them and the reformatory, was the subject that ran the gamut of the magazines. A man who originated the idea of penny savings banks in a Long Island town, became famous because writers revealed his work to the reading public. The personality, if properly written, is full of interest and offers a wide market.

Writing the "Where" Article.

The "Who" article borders closely upon the "Where" article. The "Where" article partakes of the news quality. Groups of men and women in action, reforming a

town, crusading against pests, uplifting a working centre, organizing for a reduction of costs, developing better conditions in any phase of life, or going backward in groups, as the pine folks of New Jersey, the "crackers" of Georgia, gypsies, outlaws, etc. In this category comes the story of an odd freak of nature, an historic landmark, a quaint fishing village, a pageant, a picturesque river, a mountain climbing expedition, an exploration, a conflict, a catastrophe, a war.

Qualifying for Writing.

Natural qualification for writing is an instinct, a talent, the result of heredity, but between its possession and its training into success lies a road which to traverse successfully one must study the opportunities of observation and the art of revealing by the pen those observations to others. It is not so difficult if begun correctly, moving slowly, and advancing with cumulative effort. Three great principles are necessary: study to observe, learn to write, know the markets.

CHAPTER II.

ON METHOD AND STRUCTURE IN WRITING.

The appeal—Gathering and arranging material—Building for interest—Structural forms.

WRITING for publication is a variant of public speaking—it is an attempt to entertain or instruct the public. Do not forget that. Do not forget that you are addressing an audience, perhaps 500,000 people. Do you suppose that if you were called upon to publicly address an audience of actual people, in person, you would leave the preparation of what you were to say to haphazard, or depend upon the inspiration of the moment?

When as a boy or girl you had to "speak" before the school, what did you do? Why, you worked days and perhaps weeks in preparing your "oration"; then

you repaired to the garret and you learned it by heart and then you addressed the rafters and the garret paraphernalia until, in your imagination, they became real people; you practiced until you convinced yourself that you were prepared for the ordeal—and perhaps you only actually "spoke," on the final day, to two hundred boys and girls, perhaps less.

As a writer you hope to address and interest at least a hundred thousand people, for it is indeed a poor general magazine that has not at least that number of subscribers.

The Basis of Construction.

Structure in writing is all-important, and yet I'll venture to say that but a small percentage of young, and even older writers, give the attention to structure that it deserves. They depend upon "feeling like writing," and upon what they call inspiration. Feeling like writing is important—it is a great aid in writing to "feel like it," but did it ever occur to you that you could woo the "feel like it" if you force your

will power? If you have the talent you can exercise it if you will put your mind on it.

Supposing people in other trades only worked when they felt like it. How much of the world's work would be done? I grant you the "literary sense" is something a little apart from the average employment of the mental faculties, but the literary sense can be inspired if the ambition to produce is behind it.

So, when you have a task to do, when you want to write something, either because it is your trade, or because you want to make it your trade, go about it in a rational way. Don't simply sit down and drool off the effervescence of the mind, which is really a species of mental debauchery and self-indulgence. Write properly and something that appeals to those one hundred thousand people and write it with a due consideration for what they, who have invested their money in the purchase of a magazine, have a right to expect.

In order to do this, the first principle is to give due regard to structure in your work.

Constructive Writing a Kind of Literary Architecture.

As an instance of what I mean, observe the methods of an architect. He lays his plans for the house that is to be built, from the foundation to the chimney, and he lays them out on paper, line for line, measurement for measurement, with careful consideration of the ground space allowed, the air, sun, and the natures and temperaments of the people he seeks to please. He figures out his structure with mathematical precision, so that when the builder takes his plans he is able to materialize the paper plans to the most minute degree.

Gathering the Material for Literary Building.

In considering the structure of the article you propose to write, you must first consider the character of the people you propose to address. Having settled upon this, you must gather your facts. This is done by personal, first hand investigation. This is essential to provide, not only many necessary facts, but the "color"—the local

color—the atmosphere, of the story. You can't make a story read live unless your facts are gathered first hand, or at least some of them.

An editor said of a story one of my writers once prepared: "This story is tame."

As it happened it was not possible to secure local color, first hand information, and the story had to be written from facts others had written. The writer "fell down" on the story. He should have supplied the "color" from his "box of tricks"—his imagination. A clever, skilled writer can usually draw color from his imagination and imagination is one of the most vital and important brushes in your box of tricks.

So, having gathered your color from personal contact, observation, and from investigation on the spot, you may then have legitimate recourse to what others have written on the subject. You may consult clippings from newspapers, libraries, and you may talk with others who are in touch with actual conditions.

In this way, and by these two methods you gather your dimensions—your planks and nails and framework—your foundation, your walls and your chimney. Lay them out—in the phrase of the profession, make a "lay out." Do this by filling your mind with all the facts that pertain to the story, by reading over your notes, by digesting your data.

Method of Working for Structural Form.

If you can write and have any claim to becoming a professional writer, you will then perceive and sense the most vital facts, the "news" facts in your story, and keeping your audience in mind, you will know what of the data you have gathered will interest *them*. You will also know what to discard, a function quite as important as to know what to retain in the story.

Commence at the beginning—that is, at the beginning of interest. Interest may lie in the "middle" of the story as you found it, but in order to sound the note of interest at once, you must "ring the bell"

in the first line. A single phrase, conveying a suggestive premise, an unusual fact out of its bearings, a bit of startling dialogue, will sometimes prove a good opening into interest. Beware of prologues; never apologize for what you are about to tell the reader. Tell it to him. Let him be the judge whether it is worth reading or not. Don't generalize. "Don't commence at the nebular hypothesis to prove that the world is round," said an editor to a ponderous and voluminous writer.

"'The world is round,' commence that way," he said.

Here is the way a story began in a newspaper:

"Benny was sent to me."

There was no preliminary explanation but the question at once suggests itself, who is Benny and why was he sent? The reader's curiosity is stirred at once. The start was made right from the middle of the story. The attention of the reader was arrested and the chance that the reader would investigate was one hundred to one.

In any object, and in every person, there

is always a predominant characteristic. If you were to describe a stranger to your friend, how would you begin? With the unusual about him, of course. If he is stoop-shouldered, you mention it first. If his nose is crooked, you tell your friend that he is the man with the crooked nose.

Be just as human and natural in opening your story. Start out with an attention arrester. Present, in phrase, dialogue, or by description, the note of interest upon which the story revolves, then go on with your story, drawing from your facts and data at hand to make it continuous and to sustain the story interest, being always careful not to anticipate the skilful sequence of movement. If it is a fact story the treatment of sequential facts is important. Don't protrude them in a dry, statistical, and irrelevant way. Take them out of your bag charily. Weave them into the woof of the story, as illustrative of the theme, to give it substance and solidarity—but the unfolding story interest is the vehicle that carries the reader along—not the fact. Remember that. If the story

is one dependent upon facts and figures, it is their meaning and relation that interests, not themselves *per se*. If the story is dependent upon biographical detail, date of birth, duration of the retention of this or that position, achievements of this or that sort, relate them as incident to the theme of success or failure, the accomplishment aimed to present, or the relation and bearing of the history of the time or period of which you are writing. Don't opinionize, philosophize, moralize, sermonize—that is the privilege of the editorial column or the reader. Analyze, interpret, reveal, visualize, present, pictorialize, compare, stir the reader, do not preach to him—he wishes to store his mind, not have it hammered down.

Structure means method, and many a slim theme is carried with interest upon skilful building. You can't hope to hold your readers unless you yourself first build an attractive structure. A rambling, desultory style, devoid of distinct purpose and definite lead toward action may find readers, if such material comes from the

pen of a man or woman conspicuously important, or of vital interest because of some extraneous fact, but the writer who writes for a living—writes to sell—must display his goods with as much skill as the dry-goods merchant or the successful corner grocer. He must map out a structural form of telling his story. For instance:

1. Opening a paragraph to catch interest, a phrase, a bit of dialogue, an anecdotal part of the story illustrative of the whole, a striking fact with which the public is not familiar.

2. The opening into form, suggested by the above. If the catch interest is a fact, the fact must be made interesting by separating it into its units, describing a unit and presenting the human relation, or interest therein. If the opening is a dialogue, the descriptive interest must complete interest in the person speaking, his character must be built to assure continued interest. Too much must not be revealed, only enough to assure interest, because action must really reveal character, not description. Description is scenery, words, action.

3. The body of the story—the real interest, that for which the appetite has been whetted—follows. No. 1 is the raisins on the cake, No. 2 the frosting, No. 3 the cake. The raisins catch the eye; the frosting makes the first bite pleasing, the cake satisfies.

4. The summing up. The end of an article is or should be a skilful recapitulation, in which the reader finds himself in possession of the whole fact or facts, after traversing a pleasing pursuit of them. His mind must be refreshed in that he has digested the literary feast, that he now possesses the complete knowledge, and the finish or absorption must be held off until the last paragraphs. Something must be held back. Perhaps the suspense is the general application of the story, perhaps the surprising result, perhaps the actual relations of the different facts to each other. The story must be rounded up and the reason of the beginning, the opening into interest and the body must all correlate with a complete presentation so that the picture is before him to reflect or editorialize upon

in his own mind. No story, sketch or fiction does this that lacks method and structure, carefully planned and executed by the writer. A story without this, often good otherwise, will seldom be accepted by a discerning editor.

CHAPTER III.

WRITING "DOWN" TO THE PEOPLE.

What is elemental interest—The kind of reader to interest and how to interest him—Reaching the "crowd."

"HOW will I write this?" You ask this question of your editor, don't you? You want some hint of *his* point of view; of what he sees in the "story." Perhaps the idea, or suggestion is your own. Perhaps you have come to the editor with a vague idea that you hope contains the germ of a story. You have not figured it all out; you have not built the framework or even caught the theme, or vein that you design as an appeal to the reader. You want the editor to help do your thinking for you!

From the Editor's Desk.

Perhaps the editor should. If your idea is a good one, from the point of view he has in mind, he will do the thinking for you (at your expense), and if you then bring in the story badly assembled, loosely constructed, themeless, and hitting wide of the mark, he may even turn it over to the copy editor and straighten it out for you (at your expense). But even this happens only once in a hundred times—only when the story is extraordinary, a "scoop," or in the event that you possess a special or technical knowledge of the subject. Don't count on it. The editor is too busy to do your work and, remember, you want to "make good" as a writer who can be depended upon to see all there is in a story, to get the facts, sense, the color, the scheme, the imaginative angle and deliver a finished article.

Elemental Interest.

Suppose you were out skating; suppose the ice upon which you happened to be broke loose and floated out into the river,

endangering your life. Suppose there were a crowd of people on the river bank. Would you call out to them in French to save you? Would you stop to tell them how the accident happened, or would you cry at the top of your lungs in plain English:

"Help, the ice has broken loose!"

Of course that's exactly what you would do and you would attract the attention of every man, woman, and child within hearing. After you were safely rescued and upon dry land, or solid ice, they would ask you how it happened and you would tell them all about it and they would listen and be interested in all you had to tell, even in who you were and how you happened to go skating on that particular day. You would have compelled their attention.

Method of Making a Vital Interest Appeal.

In writing "down" to the people, the ninety per cent of readers, you must literally stab their mental faculties with a sound of alarm. You must grip them at the

start. This is what a very successful editor wrote a writer on this subject:

"Most readers are in a hurry. They don't settle down with their slippers on to have 'a good read'; we have to seize their attention, giving them only what is entirely new. We have to do this, because that's what they are looking for. They don't want flourishes, reminiscence or philosophy."

Writing "down to the crowd" does not mean that you must use slang, be sensational, "yellow," or contort facts. It means that you must see the elemental interest in things and reveal it.

There is a song that runs, "She's the same old girl." The song goes on to tell of the girls of our grandmothers' days, the girls of Norway, England, France; the girls of high society, of no society, and no matter where you find her, one universal chord reaches her heart—the chord of love and affection, of tenderness and helpfulness. Those, then, are elemental, human instincts that always respond to an appeal.

Reaching the elemental in human beings is writing "down to the mob." The elemental ambitions, longings, passions, are universal. Love is elemental; love of money, of mankind, of power, of God. The religious instinct is elemental, envy is elemental. Craving for the good things of life is elemental. Passion for knowledge, to be better informed, to know things, are all elemental. Hero worship is elemental. Admiration for bravery is elemental. Curiosity is elemental. To know how the other half lives, what they are thinking about, their outlook upon life, their lives behind closed doors—these are elemental.

Method of Writing for Interest.

"Write your 'stories,'" meaning newspaper feature stories of human interest, "in parts, I, II, III, with action, a mystery or unsolved problem, a crisis—a thrill, a gulp and a gasp," is the way one editor put it to his reporters.

A college education, knowledge of the classics, of the heroes and heroines of his-

tory, the epigrams of great thinkers, the stories of mythology, and all the fine similes and precedents that the past furnishes are valued acquisitions, but in writing for the ninety per cent don't drag in the past. Write up to the minute and let the past be the food that nourishes your own mind. If you must pictorialize by reference, use Mother Goose and Hans Andersen in preference.

"Don't think of me when you write for this paper," said the editor of a New York Sunday; "think of the five hundred thousand people who buy this paper, or think of one of the average of them. I am not the one to interest."

I was told by one of the most successful editors of this day that he edited his magazine for a woman he saw in an audience before which he was giving a lecture. It was in a small town out west and the audience was not large, but he observed that every time he touched upon certain homely and heart interest topics this woman's face brightened, and her attention was absolute. It made such an impression upon him

that he therewith edited absolutely in the hopes of holding her interest. He learned her name but made no attempt to seek an introduction. In the course of a few months, however, he noticed that her name came in on the subscription list and every year, with fear and trepidation, he watches to see if it is still there. Her name has never left the books of the magazine and she has no idea of what she has inspired nor does anyone except the editor know who she is and where she lives. To him she represents the elemental intelligence that he, as editor, seeks to interest, edify, and help. Editing to hold her interest has brought him close on a million subscribers.

"Do you like to read your magazine?" I once asked him. He looked at me indulgently, a twinkle in his eye, and replied, "Mercy, no." It was not said scornfully, but deprecatingly, rather. He is too great an editor to seek to please himself.

Widening the Interest Appeal.

The "crowd," or ninety per cent, it must be remembered, does not live in the East-

ern states, nor in the Central West, the South, or the Far West; it populates the entire nation. Do not forget that, particularly in writing a magazine special. You must reach them all—that is, some of them in all the states, hence the appeal must not hinge upon any local condition, no matter how large it may seem in your estimation.

The local condition, or particular thing of which you treat, may be typical and you may draw your inspiration from it, but in order to have a wide appeal it must have a counterpart in some form or other, either in a material representation or a thought wave that sometimes sweeps over the country and becomes elemental.

Other cities besides yours have skyscrapers, large bridges, religious revivals, reform movements, zoos, railroad problems, municipal abuses, garden interests and a hundred and one diversified yet kindred topics, typical yet varied, the same in theme, but different in form and manifestation. In treating one of them you must touch a chord common to all.

Said an editor of a certain story he had

ordered of a writer, "This may be a good story, it is well written, I like the subject, but what do my readers in Kalamazoo and Dallas care about this picture of a single instance peculiar only to this town, in which you use even names and describe local structures? If you can't broaden it, I can't use it." The exceptions to this rule prove it. If you were "writing up" a model institution, sociological experiment tried out in a particular locality, the largest building in the world, the tallest tower, the most unique collection of something or other, the oddest this or that, naturally you would confine yourself to the topic, but the object or subject must be national in interest to warrant special treatment.

Making Writing for Interest a Habit.

It is the easiest form of writing to "write down" if you get your mental vision at the right angle, presupposing, of course, that you are equipped to write; that you have studied and observed the interests and emotions of your neighbors,

instead of trying to climb the heights of your own mental ladder with its top in the sky.

This implies preparation, and preparation is the result of observation and experimental excursions into the life of the masses, unless your personal experience has brought you through that stage of growth.

I once asked a celebrated after dinner speaker how it was that he always made such a hit; how he thought out all the clever things he said. His reply is to the point and instructive: "It's easy enough," he replied laughingly. "I only say what they expect me to. I go among the boys before dinner, talk with them, hear what they have to say, find out what is on their minds, what they are thinking about, and then I say it, with a story or two and a point or two apropos—that's all there is to it. Just talk to them in their own language, about the things they want to hear about."

This man would have made a great editor; he is a great lawyer.

To write down to the people—write the things they want to know about, in language they can read without being conscious that they are out of their usual reading habit.

CHAPTER IV.

MAKING THE "POPULAR" APPEAL.

An analysis of popular writing—Making facts interesting by colorful treatment—Differentiating planes of interest, studying the elemental.

ANYONE will listen to you if you talk to him about himself. The person with a good story easily compels an audience. Write as you talk, if you find that people listen when you talk.

I have in mind two metropolitan dailies, both of which have Sunday editions. Both of these papers cover about the same scope of news—in fact, nearly all large papers receive from the news-bureaus of the world similar essential facts. Yet, one of these metropolitan papers has a circulation close to a million while the other sells not over one hundred thousand copies daily.

The paper of a million readers makes the popular appeal; the other the class appeal. The writer who seeks the greatest compensation and the widest circulation must be "popular." Being "popular" is not being sensational, exaggerated or indecent. Being popular refers here to style of writing rather than subject matter. It is a matter of construction and handling the facts.

Analysis of Popular Appeal in Writing.

There are at least two vital preliminary conditions to consider in analyzing the popular appeal; the plane of intelligence of the average reader and the elemental emotions that always lie bare and are easily approached.

Readers of all degrees live in a house of planes: a house of varying degrees of development. The vast mass of people live in small towns and villages and the country. They do things for themselves; the men work with their own hands and the women have no servants. Their inter-

ests centre in home affairs. Neighbors and local politics and church matters. They can be interested, they are easily amused, they must be entertained and they may be taught.

There is another large plane of people of the popular appeal; the developing youth of the farm, the office, the factory. Their minds are curious, inquiring and impressionable. They are children in the world of thought. The famous circus man, the late Phineas T. Barnum, said that the people love to be humbugged. Abraham Lincoln, giving expression to a similar observation on human nature, said that "you can fool all the people part of the time, but you can't fool all the people all the time." The popular appeal does not contemplate fooling all the people all of the time, nor part of the people all of the time, but it does require that ninety per cent of the reading masses must be addressed in a form of expression and a method of writing that will at once whet their interest, arouse their desire for more and satisfy their ambition to increase their fund of

knowledge, or take them into imaginative lands and among peoples beyond their reach.

The reader must never be out of the mental sight of the writer. If he is "one of them," by birth and early environment, he is likely to appeal naturally, assuming that his style is not beclouded or stilted by an academic crust or form, attained at college.

"Everything is true but history," Napoleon remarked. Because "history" to be interesting is too often only known through fiction. The plain reports from the field, the government documents entombed in vaults, are never read by the public, and hardly by the savants.

We of this day and generation would know little of antiquity, recent or remote, if colorful and imaginative writers had not illuminated the pages of conquest by romance—put the human individual appeal into the dry reports of the field.

Ferrero has put the popular appeal into the Roman past. He has visualized the often too human men and women of the

forgotten period, and by comparative incident, anecdote, and local condition.

The story of a horse race is a bare recital without the expression of thrill that makes its attendance a human experience. An opening picture of the effect of a race upon a single individual, a depiction of his feelings, a word picture of his actions, outward and visible, alone brings the scene home to us and gives us the preliminary thrill and interest essential to make the bare facts that follow interesting.

To describe a burning house—describe the surge of the crowd, or the terror and plight of one rescue scene. A segment will typify the whole and bring the ensemble to the mind.

There is nothing dull in life if the writer discovers its relation to the human unit. Unessential facts and statements by way of explanation kill interest. Just because the writer makes a comprehensive study of the subject, whether the tariff, immigration, or the workings of a patent household utensil, it does not follow that he must unburden all of his new-found knowledge upon the

reader. The reader only wants the interesting thing and he wants it pointed out how it affects him.

Write to the child and you may interest the professor; write to the professor and you will not interest the child.

Eliminate categorical facts, even though their relation seems to prove the premise. The reader is not interested in proof and resents your presumption of thinking for him. Draw the picture, simply, of the interest that stands apart from its relative subordinate facts.

One fact, graphically revealed, interestingly brought home to the individual mind, makes a good "story."

I have referred to planes of interest. In one of our large cities, there was a restaurant, unique of its kind, as far as my observation extends. It was, as I recall, nine stories high. I was told that some of the upper stories were devoted to bachelor quarters. The fifth story was divided into private dining rooms and ball rooms, a costly luxury occasionally used by society and club people. The fourth story was a

ladies' restaurant, very sumptuously furnished, with a scale of prices in accordance with the surroundings and the service. The third floor was a general restaurant for men and women. The tables were closer together. The linen was not as fine; the silver was less handsome, and the carpet was ordinary, though of good quality. The menu offered *plats* and entrées, specialties, etc., at prices some twenty per cent below the schedule on the floor above. The second floor of this food palace was devoted to a "business men's lunch." The tables were plain, the linen ordinary, and the service quick, but without ostentation. There were no colored candelabra shades on the tables, nor tapestried chairs for the diners. Thirty-five to fifty cents would buy an entrée, ten cents a plate of soup, five cents coffee; and other schedules in proportion. The first floor, on a range with the sidewalk, perhaps two feet below, and approached by large double doors, was fitted with lunch counters and help-yourself dishes with tags on them:—three cents for bread; four cents for butter; three

cents for coffee; ten cents for a stew; five cents for soup, etc. Behind the counters were white-gowned waiters of the biscuit-shooting class. You waited upon yourself.

But the important fact about this unique nine-story food palace was that all the food, all the cooking, came from the same kitchen, below ground. I lunched once on the lunch counter floor. The orders were "called," the noise and confusion were unpleasant, the food was excellent—that was where the crowd was.

The restaurant represented five planes in the stage of people—the crowd always filled the first floor but all ate of the same food, in differing planes of service and environment. Of course the more expensive and exclusive dishes were not served, nor desired by the crowd.

But the vital deduction drawn was that there existed the same elemental hunger for food upon all floors. All ate bread and butter, soup, fish, meats, pastry—the constituents of a meal. Only a few ate *hors d'œuvres,* expensive fish and meat sauces,

ducks and *mousses*, brandied coffee and wine.

The writer who seeks the popular appeal must serve bread and butter, fish and meat, and dessert in simple, wholesome forms—these are elemental constituents of food.

Assume then that your audience is made up of planes, of varying degrees of intelligence, experience, environment, outlook upon life, wealth if you please, but never forget that there is in each plane an elemental emotion, a craving hunger, natural law, that is common to all, though more upon the surface on the first floor than upon the fifth.

A study of what is elemental must be the writer's equipment for his profession. He should learn this by actual contact with life; he may learn it from the work of the great masterpieces of writing that are obtainable in book store or library. The form, structure and method of appeal must reveal itself by his study and observation.

CHAPTER V.

ON IMAGINATION IN WRITING.

Without imagination the writer's field is limited — Applying imagination to every-day facts—Building up from meagre fact—Seeing meaning in things.

THE difference between writing which merely relates personal experience or personal achievements in the arts, sciences, or in the world of finance or business, in travel or exploration or in any field in which the writer is the experimenter or subject, and professional writing for publication as a means of livelihood, is that the latter, as a rule, requires the exercise of imaginative powers.

Without the imaginative quality a writer's field of work is limited. If one only writes of what one knows from personal observation or experiment, one's chances

of making writing an earning power are limited to just that extent.

A man may become an explorer for the purpose of writing about his experiences, and he may hold the public's attention over a period of years, but he will not live by his pen unless, perchance, his books yield him an income large enough, which is doubtful, and exceptional. A crusader, sometimes called a "muck-raker," may shine in the white light for a few years—a specialist on factory conditions, finance, or political economy, and he may build up a reputation, but specialization is a hazardous branch of literature.

A professional writer should be able to write about anybody and everything that he may be called upon to handle. To do this his imagination must be developed.

Now imagination in writing does not mean "faking," "padding," or drawing from the realm of fairy tales. Imagination means the ability to intelligently interpret the meanings of things and fill in the lights of the picture. It means the ability to reason constructively from known

truths. It means a perceptive sense of deduction that the reader may be given the environment, temper, and conception of things as he reads, without the necessary effort on his part of drawing the picture.

If the subject is a man who has achieved success from humble beginnings and the theme is inspirational—that is, intended to give the reader confidence that he or his son or grandson, or his neighbor or neighbor's boy, has equal opportunity of going forward in the world, then the writer's opportunity and duty is to draw the picture of the early life of the man who forms the text of the story. It is to be assumed that the writer has some real facts about the subject's boyhood days; that, perhaps, he was born on a farm, that his parents were poor, that he went to the district school, that he wore cowhide boots, that his opportunities for self-education were meagre—these and a hundred details suggest themselves as atmosphere that clusters around the life of the humble farmer's son. The writer loses his opportunity, or else he is

not qualified, if he neglects to draw the picture of early and simple beginnings, that must, to be effective, draw a contrast that he subsequently will draw of the life of the boy become a man of position, power and affluence, wealth and proprietorship.

The mere biographies of men are usually told in a quarter of a column or less in "Who's Who," but in those few lines sometimes are crystallized the storied romances of the world.

The Imagination and Facts.

The great modern Italian historian, Guglielmo Ferrero, has of recent times sprung into public favor as a writer because he has told of the stories of Caligula, the profligate Roman monarch; of Nero, the boy degenerate, the last of the Cæsars; and of Antony and Cleopatra, and told all these stories with such brilliant imaginative conceptions of their periods and their lives that he has humanized them and given us pictures that are easily comprehensible in the light of present conditions of life and society. In doing this Signor Ferrero has

not departed from history; he has simply imbued the ponderous classics with color and temperamental perceptions that reach a responsive imaginative chord in the mind of the average reader—the ninety per cent. Think you the five hundred thousand circulation papers—the great New York Sundays, and the "popular" magazines, would vie with each other in securing the work of this great writer if he failed to "write down" to the elemental vein in the average man and woman of today?

Ferrero did not achieve his art without deep study. No writer may hope to impress his stamp on the reading public who is not prepared for his work, whatever the subject. Imagination is a barren thing that does not play in rich fields of knowledge. The lives of our own men of achievement of today are rich fields. We may not *know* the secret impulses of their minds, their motives and the cunning by which they have attained their dominance, but we may know results, and it is with results and known facts that the imagination must play.

Method in Applying Imagination in Writing.

No matter what—whether an old landmark, "skyscraper," animal life—anything that lives and breathes, or is the result of artisanship or the constructive work of man, is a subject upon which the imagination can play and it is a subject or object that is linked with every human being, because in one way and another it comes parallel or direct into or toward, or verging on or within the observation of humanity.

If we write of structural things, we must people them; if we write of cold facts, of statistics, we must interpret them; if we write of wealth, of cost, of expenditure, we must reveal and compare them, draw contrasts—appeal to the imagination by revealing their significance; if we write of nature's products, of corn, sugar, tobacco, wheat, we must present what they mean to the people who consume them. We must tell of quantity by comparison, we must deduct in order to bring some or many significant facts down to the individual. If

we write of the romance of the individual, the tragedy of the life of one or two persons, we must broaden, by the art of imagination, the theme to make it reach the romantic in the natures of the ninety per cent, who may or may not have had analogous experiences.

A bare fact only startles when its significance is presented. It is the duty of the writer to "stop, look and listen" to the meanings of things; to hold his pen until he comprehends the picture, the atmosphere, the story in facts.

The book-keeper, the accountant, if he ever achieves anything beyond the rudiments of his trade, sees meanings in figures, reads success or failure in the ledger, honesty or corruption in balances.

How much more so must the writer be endowed with the deductive and constructive principles!

CHAPTER VI.

THE "FEATURE STORY."

Definition, kinds explained, method of writing, those in demand.

A "FEATURE STORY" is an article written about a feature or phase of something of current interest, every line of which must pertain, refer to and be a part of and have a bearing on the particular subject. Feature stories are much in demand, as they form the main portion of the magazine sections of the Sunday newspapers. They differ essentially from the magazine article in that a Sunday newspaper feature story usually takes for its subject a person, place, or happening in or of the news of the day. The subject may be a man or woman in the news; a place or building, a phase of war or catastrophe in the news; a city improvement, the story of a commodity, such

as sugar, coffee or oil, when "in the news", because of government investigation, regulation, a strike, or an industrial upheaval.

By the very nature of its name it is a Feature with a Story. It is something out of the ordinary; an innovation; a new twist upon an old subject.

Classification of Feature Stories.

The feature story may be divided into classifications. First, a wonder story, i.e., a story which excites the imaginative in the reader; which arouses the reader's wonderment because of the startling nature of facts or figures. Many things, because familiar sights and common knowledge to the classes, are replete with wonderment to the masses—just as children are struck with surprise at things just beyond their ken.

Second: The oddest and most unique story. This kind of a story treats of a subject or person because out of the usual, apparently out of place, or something one would not expect to find in the environ-

ment in which it is found. Women performing a work that a man has hitherto done would come under this class. A freak of nature, an odd residence, such as an octagon shaped house, the smallest watch in existence, the tallest man, the biggest oil well.

Third: The love-theme-romance, where the proprietor's son runs away and marries the mill girl; the millionaire's daughter who elopes with the chauffeur, the Enoch Arden story, the shipwreck rescue story, where romance protrudes after the news has eaten up all the details.

Fourth: The millionaire story, the story of extravagance, luxury, gorgeous living appurtenances, millionaires' hobbies, whims, philanthropies, yachts—stories where outlays of fabulous sums are involved to gratify vanity, cupidity, or revenge.

Fifth: The constructive story; the story of facts and figures, or upbuilding of cities or civic warfare, coöperative schemes, vocational organizations, public buildings and works, canals, costs of big

enterprises; the business of the movies, of staging a melodrama, an opera, circus, of conducting a campaign, a war, a warfare against sickness and plague.

Sixth: The historical story; an anniversary of Lincoln, Poe, a peace treaty, a battle, a fire, a public building. The oldest survivor, the oldest resident, the General in command, or the valet of the General, tells this story. Old prints, pictures, trophies are produced in illustration.

Seventh: The "craze" story: The story of any hysteria that sweeps the country; the dance, spiritualism, a disease cure, a moral crusade, pure food reforms, pro and anti propaganda, a new sect healer, a Coxey army, a Mafia outburst.

There is no limit to the subjects that may come into the talk of the day; that may come up for comment; that may be thrown into the news by crime or catastrophe, sensation or science, war or politics.

They all come into the great hopper of the newspaper, its Sunday edition and the syndicate, and if any sort of protracted

interest attaches itself to the subject, it becomes a proper subject from which to draw a feature story.

Writing the Feature Story.

The writing of the feature story for the newspaper is in a class by itself; not that especially selected English is necessary or a particular kind of phraseology, but to write a feature story requires a special kind of training, for it must be of the nature of news. It must tell perhaps a more or less old story of which the public has had fragments, in the dailies, as if it were entirely fresh material. It must not assume that the ninety per cent of readers know the facts and yet the hackneyed facts must be adroitly woven into the narrative, so as not to sound hackneyed, or old, or familiar. It differs from the fragments that have been published in the dailies, inasmuch as while they tell the happenings as they develop, the feature story must perceive and reveal the special big theme, must reveal the whys and wherefores, without obtrusive

opinion, and must see and present a complete story in the narrative.

The story must be the spirit in the structure, whether the structure be a man, a woman, a building, a commodity, a scientific discovery, a mine or a race. The story must give the feel of the thing, the evidences of the human relation to it, the relation it bears to life and action.

Plain recital of facts, no matter how important, tables of statistics, whatever their startling import, are not enough. The writer must tell their import—must reveal their meaning—the facts must be kept in the background, subordinated: even the design of a beautiful piece of tapestry disappears when the work is completed and the "form" upon which it is made is sloughed off. The mechanism by which results are obtained—the framework that holds up the graceful drapery in a shop window is not seen—neither must the clank and "work" of the story get on the mind of the reader. This requires a full knowledge of the subject written about. It requires that you, the writer,

must do the work behind the pen, turning off the chaff and dumping into the hopper only the threshed wheat.

Special Method.

Everything not pertinent to the story —that "dear phrase", that aside observation, that interpolated expression of opinion—must be ruthlessly cut off, trimmed, pruned, left out of the article, no matter how the operation hurts.

Stick to your story. Run your tale evenly. Make every line lead to another, refer to, be part of, and rotate around your theme, toward the goal, the completed fabric and the knot (or crisis) at the *finis*.

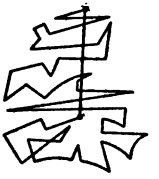
One editor, perhaps the best known in his particular field of feature stories in America, and a man who has edited four to five magazines at a time, put it this way in talking about the feature story:

"There are two ways of writing a story. Let us assume that any article or story aims to go from a given point to

a given point, thus: (Taking his pencil he drew two dots on a sheet of white paper).

"Now the idea is to go from one to the other thus:

"Some writers go this way:



"Do you think the reader enjoys the game? Well, my observation is that the way to arrive from dot one, to dot two, is, assuming that the straight line represents the story, or the real points where

the theme counts when it clinches and buttons up the story interest thus:

No. 3.

"There you have a continuous story running around and around the first premise, crossing and recrossing farther along the clincher line, or back-bone, leading the reader away in regular sequence and back nearer and nearer the knot, or crisis, holding his interest because always running parallel with previous revelations and because always coming across the back-bone climaxes or chapters, until you arrive suddenly, and when at the furthermost distance of the circumference, at the end, or real crisis."

Success in Writing the Feature Story.

Writing the "feature story" is an art, but it must be reduced to a science.

There must be definite purpose, and there are some tricks. A writer is like a magician—he must have his little box of tricks and he must be replete in surprises. He must tell something new, *or seem to,* and he must tell it with sustained interest, withholding his best berries until he turns the basket upside down, not neglecting, however, to place one row of good ones on top. That's the way the strawberry man does—he will always tip the box to show you the bottom row if you insist. He knows the packers know their business.

I once asked a celebrated and world famous writer of big stories, big scoops, stories of war and peace, science and politics, how it was that, no matter how large his theme, how seemingly ponderous his subject, how mighty his text, his stories were always interesting and easy reading.

"If they are," he replied, "it's because I do the work for the reader. Some of my five thousand word articles take a week in preparation; some a month."

Of him, one day, the proprietor of the

paper that employed him, said, in answer to some asperities made by his office associates:

"Well, my boys, you may criticise B, but let me tell you why I pay him more than any of you. He's the only man in Park Row that I know of who could write ten thousand words about the fountain in the City Hall Park and every word would be good stuff and every word would be read, and it would be a first column front page story."

He received fifteen thousand dollars a year. He never went to college. He began as a printer's devil, and his school of life was hard knocks. But he learned *how* to write; he learned how to study human nature, what was interesting and what not. He did his hardest work in gathering his material for his story, not in writing it. The feature story is a well paid form of writing and an excellent school for magazine writing. The magazine current article is only a feature story with a college education. The best training for feature story writing is the school of daily

newspaper work. In the next chapter I will define a magazine special article and differentiate between it and the newspaper feature story.

CHAPTER VII.

MAGAZINE SPECIAL ARTICLES.

Kinds of subjects suitable—The editorial tip—Question of timeliness—Style—Construction.

THE supreme test of the general writer, who seeks to make his product salable and therefore reaching standards of readableness, is the special magazine article.

The special magazine article, i. e., the high average, must comprehend the highest skill in writing, must entertain, perhaps amuse, probably instruct.

The art of writing is to tell something in an interesting way. But how to be interesting? First, the subject must be one of national (human) interest. Not that the subject must be national or universal in scope; often the simplest and most remote themes are elemental and thus national in interest. A marvellous waterfall

may be so photographed and described as to interest most readers, because all human nature loves and admires grandeur in nature. A single new species of flora in Alaska or upon the Andes may present a quality of interest worth an article if pen and the camera can reveal it. Photographs, illuminated in color, of an Arctic sunset, or a glacial formation, give a subject in the hands of a skilled writer.

Defining the Magazine Special Article.

But it is safer to write of subjects of more obvious interest—subjects that the press has exploited in the news, or subjects that, though unknown, are found in the centres of known activities. The story of a first settler of the Northwest reveals the character of the man and his environment, tells the story of achievement and gives the reader a heart throb and a thrill. We who live in the quiet paths of home, who spend our days in the office, the shop, or the field, crave the romance of the unusual, thrill with the

spirit of the crusader, and pore over the stories of the greater activities of life beyond the pale of our existence.

The editor of a farm magazine will fill his pages with practical, helpful matter, but in fiction and articles he seeks to take his readers out of the humdrum of daily life. The "popular" magazine brings into the imagination of its readers scenes and places, action and emotion, from planes beyond their actual living horizon. So in writing you must seek to accomplish this. I refer to general magazine articles, not to practical advice or helpful articles, such as form the "back of the book" in woman's magazines.

First of all in the standard magazines comes the big feature article. This article is not necessarily current in its interest, though usually so. It may be an article describing a new tribe of natives in Africa, or white Eskimos in the Arctic; the excavations of a lost city, or explorations in Tibet, in which case it classifies as a "news beat"—i. e., if it were a newspaper article it would be so considered. Usu-

ally, however, the big special is either by a big writer, or a well written article about a big current interest theme, seasonable.

To follow the news is a very safe guide in selecting a magazine special article subject; but first be sure that the news is going to last, and then anticipate it. To do the latter requires perceptive sense —usually an editorial and not a writer's quality. It follows, then, that the tip of an editorial friend is often the best advice to seek, though even the editor who gives the tip may not buy the article—some other editor may. The magazine editor is thinking six months to a year ahead, and he must gauge public interest far in advance in order to be timely. He prepares his Christmas numbers in August and his summer numbers in midwinter. The writer may find it hard to think in December terms in midsummer, and in midsummer terms at holiday time, therefore let him write his midwinter articles in midwinter for sale in August or earlier, and his summer features a year ahead. If

he strikes the note broadly the articles will have life a year hence.

Seldom is a magazine built hastily and ordinarily a good thing holds good a year. Numerous "news magazines" have been started but they have failed. Articles "rushed" for magazines seldom ring the bell. The editor who fears the subject will not retain interest is usually right, but sometimes he does not act upon his preconception and orders by cable, or "rush", an article, only to find the subject blanketed by new interests, or "dead" before the article appears. Competing, in magazines, with the newspapers or weeklies, is poor business for the writer as well as the magazine. The better and bigger story refreshes the mind of the reader a year after, gives him color and inside facts —the complete picture about what he is partially or dimly familiar—and is more satisfactory and better business.

Craftsmanship in Writing a Special Magazine Article.

The *writing* of the magazine story is of

first importance. Every efficient editor looks first for good literary workmanship. Many a good story has been returned because of its poor literary craftsmanship. Good workmanship in the business of writing is the post-graduate course in the literary art.

"I wrote and tore up my writing for thirty years," told to me the author of a dozen successful books. "It took me thirty years to attain style." This man was receiving an income of twenty thousand dollars a year from one book when he died. He gave large sums to colleges and founded a chair in the institution of which he was a graduate. He was a teacher in the public schools during those thirty years and though he could teach, he could not attain style in writing for over a quarter of a century.

I have read his books, studied some of them, and after he died, wrote two additional chapters to a new edition of one of them, and found his style so simple in construction, direct, and sustained in interest, that it is a classic in the art of

getting a theme across to a big reading public.

The magazine article, and magazine writing differ essentially from news writing. Primarily is this true with regard to methods of construction. The news story is a straight narrative of what actually happened as seen or heard by the writer, set down in sequence of events, while the magazine article reveals the milk in the cocoanut, the heart and workings of things told by one who knows all the various phases, courses, bearings and results. The news article, as a rule, does not compel the writer to develop interest in the theme, or subject, inasmuch as the very fact that it is news assures that interest. The magazine article has not this point in its favor; the writer must at once reveal or present some interesting or startling phase of the subject in hand, so as to "catch interest", start suspense, after which he may unfold the facts, by description and analysis.

In the writing of a magazine article the writer must always bear in mind his per-

spective and give attention to the perspective of the reader, thus enabling both to see the whole in its finished form. A magazine article must stand out as a completed canvas, wherein the reader, having completed the perusal of the article, gets a comprehensive knowledge of the subject.

CHAPTER VIII.

DIALOGUE.

What dialogue represents in fiction, its proper relation to description and analysis—Making dialogue carry character.

"DUNCAN ran toward the corner. He could see an unusual commotion in the neighborhood of the old stone mill, just beyond the wooden bridge.

"'There he goes—thief!'

"Duncan stopped—he was of powerful frame, a lumberman by trade, and feared no man. At full speed the branded man came toward him, the crowd of excited villagers at his heels like a pack of hounds.

"'Stop, or I'll——"

"The man almost fell against him.

"'Save me, save me,—they'll kill me!'

"Duncan's iron grip closed around the man's trembling body.

"'What have you done?'

"'Took an egg from the hen-coop—and you've crushed it in my pocket.'"

Dialogue is thought in action. By it the animate is given life—the inanimate you can describe. Text with effective dialogue is the most dramatic method of carrying moving fiction.

"With all the fury of an outraged soul she hated him!"

The above illustrates the "tell" method, neither effective in giving the "feel" to the line nor visualizing the action of the character.

"'I hate you; I loathe you!' The man's attack was repelled by the fury of her words, her flushed cheek, tight set lips."

Here the reader is given the actual words and the effect they had upon action.

"She came slowly down the road, her eyes peering through the darkness toward her home. 'I'm going home,' she said."

Should read:

"Peering through the darkness, she could just see across the heavy road the

outlines of a house. It was a long journey, but a smile lighted up her face. 'I am going home!'"

In the latter form significance is given to the words, whereas, in the former, the words "I am going home" are superfluous because they are anticipated in the description.

Dialogue must reveal the unexpected in the text or at least the unanticipated. It must reveal the working of thought, whereas description and analysis make the "lead," color, environment or frame for the actual expression.

The Relation of Dialogue to Action.

To draw a simile, let me suggest the analogy of the "book" and the scenery of a play. The "scenery" in fiction is the description, the "book" the dialogue. A novelized play is one in which the writer describes what the scene painter has presented and what "business" directs. "Business" in a play is "putting the revolver in a drawer of the writing desk,"

Interspersing the dialogue must come the properly balanced text which reveals the emotional disturbance of the speaker, the environment, the analysis of thought, the effect of the words upon the person or persons to whom the dialogue is directed, a "plant" to prepare the reader's mind for subsequent developments of the plot.

Care must be taken not to anticipate development or plot and equal care must be exercised not to lead the reader's mind away from the main theme or story interest. Only such description or analysis must be given as pertains directly to the immediate situation in hand; never leading the thought of the reader away into pastures of thought irrelevant to the development of the story.

Revealing Character in Dialogue.

Dialogue is character expression—it must always be consistent and never complicated. Through dialogue the reader becomes acquainted with the *dramatis personæ* of the drama. Both the words

and the thought and expressions carried in the dialogue must be consistent with the character of the speakers. This presupposes a sure knowledge on the part of the writer of the character of his manikins. The "villain" must always be a consistent villain, must think, act and talk constantly in terms of his character; the "hero" must not be tricky or dishonorable or compromise with his ideals—in fact, his consistent actions as the hero will lead him into the defence of his position and stimulate villainy to thwart him. The "heroine," if she be the central figure, must be always in the background, the person to be extricated from the complicated situations devised by the writer. The less she says the better; description better qualifies her than dialogue, though when she does speak her words must be wholly characteristic of her perhaps timid or shrinking nature.

Dialogue, to be effective, must reveal the contrast of the characters in play. Two who speak similarly or act and think alike do not form interesting dialogue;

opposites must clash. Long speeches, as a rule, must be avoided. If the character indulges in reflective thought or contemplative anticipation, such thought is better carried in analysis, as:

"Deep down in Millicent's heart she knew that she loved Wade, but wild horses could not drag the admission from her heart. Wade had not written her since he left Westonville, vowing his love for her, and now that he had returned, she suffered deeply the wound that his silence had inflicted upon her.

"'Of course I forgive you, Wade,' she said quietly, 'but time heals.'"

The danger a young or inexperienced writer confronts is in overwhelming the dialogue by preceding description or text that tells too much; so much that when the dialogue comes it is ineffective.

The Place of Dialogue in the Story.

Dialogue is the pistol shot in the twilight—the crash of thunder in the storm; the splash in the quiet stream, the knock at the door of the silent room—it is the

action, life, vitality, movement of the story.

Dialogue is an effective form of opening a chapter, after which the reader's interest may be sustained through such analysis, description, etc., as is necessary to develop color and form. This refers, of course, to the novel or long story. As each chapter should be a complete part or incident of the whole story, dialogue may also be successfully and effectively employed at the finish of a story as it presents a good vehicle of suspense, to be carried or "continued in our next."

CHAPTER IX.

CHOICE OF WORDS AND PHRASES.

Words as color for the brush of the writer-painter—Dangers in their uses—Forethought in choosing words—Bromides.

WORDS are canned thoughts. There are words unlimited. Some people are born with words, others achieve them, while others fight them like pests. There are people who "talk you to death"; so there are writers who lure you with a maze of words, charm you sometimes by their deliberation, symbolism, rhythm, yet say nothing, tell you nothing, visualize nothing.

If there is one fault in the unskilled writer more offensive to the editor than any other, it is the habit of being wordy. This fault is due, possibly, to wrong train-

ing, or lack of it, in school or college, but above all it is the fault that kills ability to write.

The neophyte in literary craftsmanship is gifted with fluent expression and paucity of ideas, of knowledge founded on fact and experience, and the fault of excessive wording is natural. But let that fault be overcome as quickly as possible. Let words be the sure and noiseless vehicle of thought. Employ them with respect and understanding. Know your word, know its real meaning, both as defined by the dictionary and accepted in current use. Beware of high sounding phrases, school learned quotations, the current bromides of unlearned people, dull words, words of indefinite meaning.

Words for Forceful Construction.

Words are the bricks with which you build your house of thought; they are the wheels, the rails, over which glides the train of thought you seek to express.

Begin your sentences with strong words. For instance, do not say:

"In the grey of the northern sky the Aurora Borealis painted livid colors."

Say rather:

"Livid colors—the flash of the Aurora Borealis—lighted up the grey of the early dawn."

Use strong words at the end of your sentences. For instance do not say: "An argument is on foot as to whether an artist's model should talk or not." Rather say: "should or should not talk." Weak words suggest weak thoughts. The strongest words in the English language are the simplest, because they are words that are derived from, or are actually nouns—names of something that signifies strength. Use only adjectives that qualify the character or degree of the noun.

"She was a wonderful woman." "Wonderful" does not describe or qualify anything distinct in the reader's mind. Nature may be wonderful, miracles are wonderful. Generalization in the use of words is fatal to distinct meaning. If she were a wonderful woman, let the reader know it by presenting her description, her

acts, or thoughts, from which the reader may infer her unusual qualities—do not declare the fact. She was perhaps wonderful because of her beauty, her grace, her brilliancy, her achievement. Paint her as you see her and the reader will see her with wonder.

Guard against using adjectives that are really exclamations; great! remarkable! extraordinary! unique! startling! and the like.

There is a very fine line of distinction between presenting the picture and telling about it. Only qualifying, descriptive, precise words reveal to the reader a scene or an action. Do not tell about what you think or saw, but use words to let the reader see what you wish to throw upon the screen of his mental vision.

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"He was as big as a mountain," is ridiculous. You might say "He was a Barnum giant; he was Gargantuan"; but never compare him with a mountain, or an oak, or a house. There is no analogy in such a metaphor. Select a comparison, if one you must have, of a like species. There are plenty to draw from in life or history or mythology.

CHAPTER X.

THE STORY FROM INSTITUTIONAL WORK.

Definition—How to find it—How to write it—Its literary and editorial value.

NO matter how fond one might be of nuts, can you imagine biting through the prickly covering to eat one? The bur of the chestnut must be broken before the nut is in a condition to be eaten. The oyster-man pries open and discards the shell before he serves the meat of the bivalve.

So must one, in handling a story dug out of institutional work, inspired by sociologic and charitable effort, strike one's mental hammer against the shell, the structure, the machinery, of the institution, in order to present a story that will interest the ninety per cent of readers. The widely diversified ramifications of the in-

"opening a door at left of stage," etc. The writer must say:

"Millicent was standing just in front of the opened door. Through the aperture she could see the form of John, as he came down the road.

"'See, Marie, he's wounded.'

"The man staggered almost as she spoke——"

In other words, if you are a frequenter of the theatre you can learn the proper place for dialogue in narrative, differentiating it from the descriptive ("scene" and "business") parts. Every bit of writing must be so handled as to make the dialogue effective, and interpretive — standing out staccato-like from the rest of the text. The descriptive part of the text must contain the suspense preparation, the action or effect revealed in the dialogue.

Yet the two, dialogue and descriptive text, must so balance that each is dependent upon the other. The free use of dialogue is dangerous lest the reader's mind is tired, or carried at so rapid a pace that the effect or picture is lost.

Interspersing the dialogue must come the properly balanced text which reveals the emotional disturbance of the speaker, the environment, the analysis of thought, the effect of the words upon the person or persons to whom the dialogue is directed, a "plant" to prepare the reader's mind for subsequent developments of the plot.

Care must be taken not to anticipate development or plot and equal care must be exercised not to lead the reader's mind away from the main theme or story interest. Only such description or analysis must be given as pertains directly to the immediate situation in hand; never leading the thought of the reader away into pastures of thought irrelevant to the development of the story.

Revealing Character in Dialogue.

Dialogue is character expression—it must always be consistent and never complicated. Through dialogue the reader becomes acquainted with the *dramatis personæ* of the drama. Both the words

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and the thought and expressions carried in the dialogue must be consistent with the character of the speakers. This presupposes a sure knowledge on the part of the writer of the character of his manikins. The "villain" must always be a consistent villain, must think, act and talk constantly in terms of his character; the "hero" must not be tricky or dishonorable or compromise with his ideals—in fact, his consistent actions as the hero will lead him into the defence of his position and stimulate villainy to thwart him. The "heroine," if she be the central figure, must be always in the background, the person to be extricated from the complicated situations devised by the writer. The less she says the better; description better qualifies her than dialogue, though when she does speak her words must be wholly characteristic of her perhaps timid or shrinking nature.

Dialogue, to be effective, must reveal the contrast of the characters in play. Two who speak similarly or act and think alike do not form interesting dialogue;

opposites must clash. Long speeches, as a rule, must be avoided. If the character indulges in reflective thought or contemplative anticipation, such thought is better carried in analysis, as:

"Deep down in Millicent's heart she knew that she loved Wade, but wild horses could not drag the admission from her heart. Wade had not written her since he left Westonville, vowing his love for her, and now that he had returned, she suffered deeply the wound that his silence had inflicted upon her.

"'Of course I forgive you, Wade,' she said quietly, 'but time heals.'"

The danger a young or inexperienced writer confronts is in overwhelming the dialogue by preceding description or text that tells too much; so much that when the dialogue comes it is ineffective.

The Place of Dialogue in the Story.

Dialogue is the pistol shot in the twilight—the crash of thunder in the storm; the splash in the quiet stream, the knock at the door of the silent room—it is the

a bettered condition. Paint, too, so that the reader can see the picture—not you—and select carefully what is of human interest within the institution where humans are in various stages of development, reform or healing. Tell of the heart throb, the live thing, the pathos, the tragedy, the personality behind the doors.

I asked an editor of one of the five hundred thousand circulation home companion magazines to whom he addressed his magazine:

"To the woman who opens her own door," he replied instantly.

The woman who opens her own door is not going to wade through a lot of statistical, structural, secretarial report-like matter to learn how cripples are taught to be self-supporting. Such a story must picture the cripple in his evolution from a helpless creature—a charge on the community—to a happy, occupied, self-helping child. The institution or organization which brings about this remarkable change must be content to have its work presented—its identity, like your own, subordinated.

How to Write the Institutional Story.

Begin with an incident. Select, from your observation, a typical child, if the work has to do with juveniles. Pick up scraps of his conversation; picture him in the environment. Give him his name. Make him real—just like a little news story that you often find tucked away in the daily news pages. But the child, or scene, or story, must be typical of the institutional work. Follow this opening with facts, but hang them on the branches, like fruit. Don't jam them together and hurry by. If a fact or figure is worth mentioning it is worth a proper setting. Study your facts as the jeweller does his precious stones. The setting may be in the form of analysis—the setting should be the theme, or the story proper, the fact the nail that holds it up. Uncolored facts and figures are deadly to the average story unless dropped in softly, incidentally, and with skill so as not to stick up and make one stub one's mental toe.

The dangers in writing stories from institutional work are several. They include over-zealousness; failure in supplying the color; lack of visualization of the fact, introduction of the spirit of urge; too much about the work done by the institution and its needs, too little about the human interest picture within the organized structure.

A story, either for a Sunday magazine feature or a general magazine, to be interesting, should be approached with the same independence of presentation as if the institution did not exist.

If one were to write of a street accident one would not describe the street, its length and breadth—the institution is merely the street, the path that holds the story.

Gathering Material.

To find this story a thorough investigation of the tentacles of the institution must be made. From a single piece of quartz the government assay office will tell how much pure ore there is to the ton. From a

drop of blood the physician will diagnose tuberculosis. Not that the creature of an institution is as certain to represent the whole, but *some* creature represents the work of the institution and having sought and found that tentacle, let the story be inspired thereby.

"Tomasso's father was a push-cart vender, who lived in a squalid East Side tenement. There were six in Tony's family and Tomasso was the youngest. They all lived in two rooms, Tony, his wife and the four brats. Even in the four dirty walls the spirit of Tomasso was unquenchable. He loved the flowers as did his progenitors who tended the estates of an overlord on the slopes of Naples. It was a soft balmy day in early spring when Tomasso escaped the dingy abode up five flights and entered, at first unnoticed, the garden of John Deering, whose great house across the square, not ten blocks away in congested New York, tempted Tomasso. He plucked one geranium, a dirty little fist full of violets, and ran tumbling out the gate straight into the arms of the

burly gardener. There happened a policeman along the block, and the gardener's call of 'Stop, thief!' aroused him. He caught Tomasso by the shoulder and held him in his big hand.

"'What's this, you young scalawag, stealing, eh?' as he noticed the tightly clenched flowers.

"'Yessir, the young brat, an' he's been at it before now—I want him arrested,' the gardener fumed.

"Tomasso's English was untranslatable, so he was dragged away to the society for examination and observation."

The above is illustrative of a lead into the work of an institution. It opens the story with a human interest incident. The story may run on weaving its web around Tomasso, so that the reader while interested in the experiences of Tomasso, learns in an interesting way the workings of an institution.

acts, or thoughts, from which the reader may infer her unusual qualities—do not declare the fact. She was perhaps wonderful because of her beauty, her grace, her brilliancy, her achievement. Paint her as you see her and the reader will see her with wonder.

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Checkered career.

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stitution and its mechanism have almost nothing to do with the "story," no matter how eagerly Superintendent This, or Instructor That, invites dissertation upon the efficacy of the organization and its statistical achievements.

It is the chick that one watches through the incubator's window, not the machine itself; perhaps afterwards some observers will ask about the incubator. It is the orphan child or the derelict of society whom the institution is helping, not its yearly report, that interests.

The Interest.

If the institutional story be about the education of the blind, present the picture of the blind inmate at class, or in the workshop. Reveal, through interview, what the inmate thinks as he works, his attitude or outlook toward life, if changed or bettered by the work he is taught to do. Subordinate your opinion, strike off the shell of external structural facts and paint with your mental brush the picture of the blind in the environment that looks to

a bettered condition. Paint, too, so that the reader can see the picture—not you—and select carefully what is of human interest within the institution where humans are in various stages of development, reform or healing. Tell of the heart throb, the live thing, the pathos, the tragedy, the personality behind the doors.

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his boyhood days, his ideals and ideas of success in life and dwelt upon many topics, personal and business. When I went to see Mr. Cromwell, I had studied every available scrap of information about him, and was able to "draw him out." The interviewer cannot draw a man out unless he is charged with the facts that will challenge interest.

When the Interviewed Objects.

In obtaining the interview that is objectionable to the interviewed personage, great diplomacy and considerable strategy are essential. Sometimes this has to be done without the full preliminary knowledge of the "victim," who, though he may consent to an interview, steels himself against attack. In such a case it is sometimes necessary to ask impertinent questions, questions that arouse the interviewed person to anger. A man will sometimes say in anger what he would not otherwise say, but while such means may be necessary, they are not always safe. The personage may repudiate his words. On the other

hand, he may be glad that he "let himself go," and stand by them.

I once interviewed a Japanese Ambassador, who was as reticent as an idol until I touched him upon a sore diplomatic point—the object of my interview—and he spoke freely and with evident excitement. I prodded him along until I felt that he was glad he had talked and cleared the air, and he consented to let it go, "now that he had spoken."

General Method in Writing the Interview.

In writing an interview, great skill is required, for accuracy is of vital significance and it is unsafe to take any liberties with the words of a public man, without his consent. If you feel justified in amplifying his thought, the manuscript should be submitted for his correction and approval. In all important interviews this is much the safest rule, though often matter will be cut out that mitigates the importance of the interview—sometimes destroys it entirely. In such a case it is better to

re-interview the personage and try and prevail upon him to either permit the matter to go, or modify it with additional material.

The interview is the "touchiest" of all work for the press, and the writer's reputation for veracity and accuracy is in danger. It is highly paid special work and is extremely valuable to the writer. It places him in touch with big minds, and often opens to him sources of information for future consultation. One of the most valuable acquisitions a writer can have is the acquaintance and confidence of prominent men. Without it his progress and success is slow. To have the ear of men who are in the limelight, to be able to consult them on important questions and secure their viewpoints—that is stock in trade for the newspaperman or magazinist, of enduring value.

Special Phases of Interview Writing.

There are numerous minor points, the knowledge of which are of importance to

one who would be a successful interviewer. I call them minor points because they are not essential to the beginner and become, obviously, a part of the equipment of the trained interviewer. One of these is the knowledge of human nature. A beginner may not possess this knowledge; only experience in life develops it. A beginner, however, may add to his box of tricks by sitting at the feet of his elders, and listening to their advice and comment upon men and things. He may learn quickly to size up a "hard" man, a vain man, an egotistical man, a secretive man, a liar, a crook, etc.

These and other character traits are written on the faces of men and women. Vanity reveals itself in self-praise, dress, jewels, boastfulness, and features, as does egotism. The crook has excessive bluff and a watchful eye; the secretive man a tight mouth, a closing hand, and fingers drawn close together; a hard man, a protruding chin, a sloping forehead, and he is mincing in words, he has a short thick thumb and a fat palm; a liar, long

shapely fingers set apart, narrow eyes, a glib tongue, and often much politeness—these are only suggestive signs, not always obvious nor always accurate, but simply indicate that a study of physiognomy, phrenology, palmistry and even astrology, will, if not taken too literally, aid the interviewer.

Skill in presentation is essential to catch the reader's interest, sustain it, and merit it. The keynote should be struck in the first paragraph, without "giving away" the story to follow. In the actual work of securing the interview the keynote is frequently not revealed until the end, but like the grocer who offers fruit for sale, some of the best offerings are displayed on top, not forgetting the necessity of reserving equally good ones for the bottom—the purchaser may invert the contents of the basket, even as the reader often jumps to the end, after the first paragraph, to see if the stuff is worth going through.

The mechanics of gaining the interview should not appear in the copy. "I asked Mr. Smith what he thought of the situa-

tion in West Virginia and he said," is obviously an amateurish form, and all similar interpolation of what the interviewer asked. The reply should reveal the question, for only in the reply is the reader interested. About all the public should know of the interviewer's part in the interview is his name at the top of the interview. Any other reference in the text is to reveal unessential and diverting mechanics. The interview must stand out clear and continuous, as concrete a reflection of the personality of the one interviewed and an expression of his ideas and opinions, as is a piece of silver the expression of the artisan whose name or hall mark it bears.

Remember always that an interview is news, an opinion that is as much news as the report of a fire or a battle. If it is not news it is merely an editorial—a comment after the fact—not an interpretation of a situation, or a condition, a phase of the moment, a perplexing, interesting upheaval of local or national significance. Great minds, men of particular qualifications or position, are competent to impart to the

public newsy interpretation, or revelations because of their special knowledge or pivotal position in the public eye, either about the subject in question or themselves.

The fashion in interviewing is as whimsical as in woman's dress, and only by reading and studying the different newspapers of greatest circulation in the largest cities may the beginner hope to keep *courant* in interviewing.

CHAPTER XII.

MAKING THE HUMAN APPEAL

Getting acquainted with your audience—Getting the true atmosphere—Thinking for your readers, the acid test of literature.

AN editor of a magazine of some four hundred thousand circulation, in returning to me a manuscript I had submitted, wrote:

"The article you have been so good as to let me see is too far afield—it lacks the appeal necessary to reach our readers."

The criticism is very informative to a writer who is seeking to market his wares. It taught me a lesson in discrimination. I sent the article to a magazine of class, or restricted circulation, and it was promptly accepted.

There is an old saw that counsels, "do not cast pearls to swine"; it might have continued: "feed them corn."

The magazine reaching a sale of half a million copies appeals in the language and in the line of thought and interest of the average intelligence. Addressing the editor about an article offered and writing the article, are two totally distinct forms of expression.

Adapting Writing to the Majority.

Write with your audience; keep "down" to them. Keeping "down" is a very much misunderstood phrase. Keeping down does not necessitate lowering your style; it means simplifying your style. Hunt your Thesaurus for synonyms that are easy to grasp, that are the common denominators of language. "Lizzie" and "John" and their fathers and mothers do not converse in academic phrases. Stilted expressions do not ring true with them.

There are five hundred thousand "Lizzies" and "Johns" and they are the readers of newspapers and magazines of largest circulation.

Writing to "Lizzie" does not compel you to resort to first primer methods.

Some of our most read and popular authors use the simplest language. While easily understood words in themselves are important to success in writing for the market, selection of method and theme are equally essential. Writing is a trade and utilizes as many tricks and accessories, skill and "business" as stagecraft. You cannot hope to interest "Lizzie" in the Washington Monument or the nebular hypothesis, unless you approach her upon her mental plane of comprehension.

I have shocked more than one writer who brought in an article, wholly discursive and pedagogic, by asking if they ever talked to the elevator boy. "Did you speak to him in the language in which this article is written? Did you ever address your maid, or your waiter, or a car conductor, in such words and about such subjects?"

"Certainly not."

"How, then, do you hope to reach them through the newspapers or popular magazines with this writing, directed to the student or professor?"

Write over the heads of a percentage

of the purchasers of a magazine or newspaper and you limit your readers and your market, for the editor, if he prints your stuff, finds out that it doesn't appeal.

It has been said of great public speakers, politicians, preachers, publicists, that they have something of the clown in them, something of the demagogue, something of the actor. Why? They appeal to the emotions and risibilities of a motley audience. They stoop to conquer. They descend to a quip or rise to an exaggeration to strike a blow of interest, to shake their audiences out of their lethargy, to amuse, to astound, to alarm—all to sprinkle in the propaganda of which they are the champions.

These are tricks to get "Lizzie's" attention. You can't amuse, interest, or educate "Lizzie" unless you gain and hold her attention.

Studying Human Nature.

The ability to do this presupposes some knowledge of the average of human nature. If you lack that human touch, if

you have not mingled with such people, studied their thoughts and interests, watched their comings and goings, how can you hope to get their attention? You must be as vitally interested in reaching them as is the editor or owner of the paper or magazine who seeks to sell them the printed sheet, as much as the advertiser who exploits his goods in the columns adjacent to yours.

I knew a young girl writer who went and lived and worked in East Side New York for several years to understand the lives, hopes, interests and emotions of the people about whom she wanted to write. Some years later, to make more sure her grounds, she went abroad and lived among them on their native soil. I know a man who crossed in the steerage not once but several times to get the true atmosphere of the immigrant; another who disguised as a tramp to get himself arrested in various cities before he wrote a line of the people of the submerged tenth. In a western city lives a popular and successful authoress who has

studied girl life in cities from coast to coast in order to tell the story of a Best Seller.

Writers who succeed must know and feel their characters, understand the stories, fiction or otherwise, that they paint. In this study of experience they learn the lesson of appeal. They learn that their theme must carry the real thing and their writings must talk as people talk to each other, not forgetting that construction, method, suspense, continuity of interest, thrill and humor all have their proper place and value, even as have sustenance, delectability, selection, service, time and place their proper relations in food.

To make this appeal, which is the phase of literary craftsmanship that is most likely to win success for the author, you must cultivate a habit of analysis, of observation of every kind of human nature with which you come in contact.

Special Methods of Achieving Wide Appeal.

A woman writer who made such an appeal to the great human average that a

big daily newspaper syndicated her stories of emotional home life for years, told me that this appeal was not by any means haphazard on her part but studied with all the scientific forethought which a surgeon puts into his diagnosis.

"I keep a score of note books," she explained, "and in these, under alphabetically arranged headings, I keep records of my observations of human nature in the street, at the theatre, in homes, in shops—anywhere! I note how people dress, act, greet each other, behave under the emotions of joy, excitement, sorrow, surprise. I note their tricks of speech, their mannerisms, their likes, their dislikes.

"This gives me power to write for them because I know what each would say or do under similar circumstances to those which I delineate in my stories."

Any writer will do well to establish this habit of literary diagnosis of character. Study to observe character sympathetically and minutely and keep a record of your observations.

"Lizzie's" tricks of manner, gesture, manner of living, her emotions and how they express themselves, her courage or cowardice, her deceits, her joys, her clothes,—the way the world revolves in "Lizzie's" eyes—these observations put into literature spell successful appeal for the author.

First be sure you have control of a theme—a story or article—that will interest and concern the majority, or a large audience of people. Then prepare it for sale to them. As I have said before, open your story with an anecdote, an incident, or an analysis that piques interest—compel a continuity of interest by introducing a trick of suspense—something hinted at but held back, startle with a scene or a fact of human interest, think for your reader, make it easy for him to read, carry him on your shoulders of thought. Keep your heavy stuff sugar-coated, grease the axles of your wheels of construction with simple language, drop in adroitly your facts, leap quickly into color environment that makes him feel and hold the reader tightly in your